

Application Summary

Application: FY25 DMO Plan

Applicant: Gardiner Chamber of Commerce

Funding opportunity: FY25 DMO Plan

Application Responses

Organization Name: Gardiner CVB/DMO

First Name: Terese

Last Name: Petcoff

Street Address 1: 216 Park St.

Street Address 2: POB 81

City: Gardiner

State: MT

Zip: 59030

Funding Opportunity: FY25 DMO Plan

Amount Requested: 85,388.80

General Description Information

1. Describe your destination (who you are, who you wish to attract and why would they come) addressing your strengths, opportunities, and potential challenges.:

1a. Destination:

The small hamlet of Gardiner, known as "Nature's Favorite Entrance to Yellowstone National Park", is located in southwest Montana at the North Entrance to Yellowstone National Park. Nestled between the Absaroka-Beartooth and the Gallatin Mountain ranges, Gardiner is surrounded by approximately 10 million acres of public lands. The community enjoys year-round access to the Yellowstone River--the longest free-flowing river in the lower 48 states. Since the early 1880's, Gardiner has served as the original entrance to Yellowstone National Park and is graced by the historic Roosevelt Arch, dedicated by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1903.

Our community's small-town Montana charm, natural splendor, and abundant wildlife make it a unique "home on the range" for our nearly 900 residents. Year-round access to Yellowstone's Northern Range truly differentiates Gardiner from other Yellowstone gateway communities. The community also enjoys a rich history as the original entrance to Yellowstone National Park, which has left a flavor of Old West heritage evidenced by historic buildings and the Roosevelt Arch.

1b. Strengths:

Our charming small town offers relaxing hospitality while providing full-service amenities. Many Gardiner

restaurants offer local and sustainably grown produce and Montana raised beef. Visitors will find a diverse selection of accommodations including modern hotels and inns, rustic cabins, quaint cottages, relaxing B&B's, and vacation rentals. Some guest lodging experiences offer for our visitors horseback riding and fishing by day, and cowboy cookouts and campfires by night.

Year-round access to Yellowstone National Park and easy access to Forest Service, BLM lands, and MT FWP lands provide visitors with an array of recreation opportunities. These include whitewater rafting, ziplining, cross-country skiing and snowshoeing, snowcoach tours, photography, wildlife watching, hiking, and fishing. Between Gardiner and Paradise Valley there are two unique hot springs experiences in which visitors can unwind after a long day participating in various recreation activities. In response to visitor interests our area has begun to offer even more recreation activities like e-biking, optics rentals, and night sky watching tours.

1c. Opportunities:

As Gardiner emerges from three of the most challenging years our community has experienced from 2020 – 2022 including visitation levels that pushed our community's services to their limits to nonexistent visitation due to a historic flood that reminded our community of the traveler's significance to Gardiner. We will continue to highlight this appreciation by communicating to visitors that their dollar goes further in a town comprised of small family businesses.

We continue to see our largest opportunities for tourism growth in the winter and shoulder seasons, respectively November – April. According to National Park Service in 2023/24 recreational visits, December through March, only contributed to approximately 10.94% of the total North Entrance visits for the calendar. This is up from 2022/23 in which approximately 10.35% of the total North Entrance visits happened from December – March. During this time frame the GDMO will look at expanding or improving upon event opportunities and continue gearing our marketing towards the drive markets, additionally, marketing to peak season travelers to return in the winter time while they are attending events in the summer.

1d. Potential Challenges:

Workforce Housing & Staff:

Workforce continues to decrease in the Gardiner area. The lack of affordable, residential, and year-round housing continues to be the biggest threat to hiring and retaining employees. In the winter and shoulder seasons, the lack of year-round staffing and a much lower visitation rate make it difficult for businesses to remain open resulting in a shortage of accessible visitor amenities. Our staff consistently receives feedback from visitors that are disappointed and frustrated that a variety of businesses are not open in both the winter and shoulder seasons that they would like to support. Showcasing that undoubtedly, the lack of a strong workforce has directly impacted the visitor experience.

North Entrance Road Alignment & Climate Change:

As stated in the FY24 plan, in 2022 as Gardiner businesses prepared for what reservations were forecasting to be the busiest season to date. All businesses were forced to pivot their businesses practices. Businesses built more or created employee housing, gave significant raises to those currently employed, and increased starting pay to maintain, attract, and expand their workforce; some leased sections of their land to food vendors; others expanded their activity and retail offerings – this was all done in effort to meet not only the needs of the record breaking increased visitation of 2021 but improve the overall visitor experience. Then on June 13, 2022 our small community's economy came to a virtual standstill when unprecedented flood levels of the Yellowstone River and its tributaries damaged homes, bridges, highways in Yellowstone and along US HWY 89, and more. It's damage was so severe that access into Yellowstone via the North Entrance Road from Gardiner was cut off from June 13 until the eventual reopening of a newly constructed road that reopened on October 30, 2022. Reconnecting Gardiner back to Yellowstone National Park for unlimited visitor access was crucial for our gateway community and we are incredibly grateful for the reconnection, but the flood and it's ensuing damage brought countless challenges that continued into 2023. With the final alignment of the North Entrance having yet to be announced the businesses in our small community hope that whatever alignment is to be chosen does not limited visitor use of the North Entrance Road during construction. We foresee that if an alignment is chosen in which 30 - 60 minute construction delays are proposed our towns economic viability during new construction would once again come into question as visitors would avoid our entrance all together. Finally, it is important to note the role climate change plays in our challenges. Not only do YNP officials sight climate change as a cause of the 2022 flood but climate change leads to other YOY challenges, such as lack of snow, which not only could cause winter travelers to postpone or cancel their trip but also impacts water levels and recreation in the peak summer season. Additionally, a low snow year could lead to a higher likely hood of wildfires in which guests could also postpone or cancel their peak season travel.

Wildlife Controversies

As in prior years public/private wildlife controversies are an added challenge for Gardiner and the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. While wildlife issues are not a new challenge and they can cast a harmful shadow to the area's tourism economy when they arise. For example, when a change in Montana Legislation (February 2022) allowed an unlimited wolf hunting and trapping quota, nearly all of Yellowstone's Phantom Lake Pack was killed. This led to national coverage of the area that for the most part was in an unfavorable light. Additionally, the harsh winter of 2022 - 2023 led Yellowstone Bison (which have historically roamed outside of the park's Northern boundary into Gardiner and beyond) to travel out in record breaking numbers. With more Bison outside of the park this led to a higher culling of the animal and more exposure than ever on the controversial hunt and park sending them to slaughter casting yet another harsh spotlight on our area.

2. Briefly describe how your destination aligns with the Montana brand or describe the Brand strategy for your DMO.:

Gardiner aligns perfectly with the state's brand pillars. Located at the heart of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, Gardiner is surrounded by unspoiled nature with beautiful vistas and landscapes that are home to some of the most abundant and diverse wildlife in North America. Gardiner prides itself as the historic gateway to Yellowstone's natural wonders. Our messaging focuses on the area's abundant wildlife, destination management and education, authentic and local hospitality, and year-round recreational activities as the only year-round entrance to Yellowstone National Park.

Through destination marketing we will focus on shoulder season marketing specifically the winter and spring season by engaging in multi-faceted marketing, including print and digital mediums. Through destination management we will educate travelers to the area via our website as well as in our Visitor Center and through out the community by engaging and providing materials to high traffic areas such as the local market, area lodging and dining facilities, and more. Finally, we will use destination development to improve our destination specifically by updating and providing cohesive signage throughout Gardiner at Gardiner DMO operated areas.

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Destination Marketing:

Destination Management:

Destination Stewardship:

Destination Development:

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3a. Define your audience(s) (demographic, geographic and psycho-graphic):

The target market for both increasing visitation and managing our destination remains the geo-traveler (defined below). Efforts will target promoting the outdoors to the authentic experience seeker and wildlife enthusiast, incorporating educational messaging toward responsible recreation, managing visitor expectations, and highlighting the resilience and distinctiveness of our community.

Geo-traveler:

The National Geographic Society defines Geotourism as "tourism that sustains or enhances the geographical character of a place—its environment, culture, aesthetics, heritage, and the well-being of its residents."

Specific to our area, the geo-traveler is a visitor who supports local businesses, respects our residents and wildlife, understands the potential challenges of our environment (weather, travel time, etc.), and seeks out experiences unique to the area. They place a high-value on preserving the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (GYE) and assist in its preservation by having a low-impact themselves and educating others on the importance of responsible recreation practices.

Adventurous Couples or Families:

Couples and families, ages 35-54

College-educated

United States: typically from California, Texas, Utah, Washington, Colorado and the Midwestern Region.

Household Income \$80,000 + per year

Interested in traveling to areas rich in outdoor recreational experiences, especially in the winter.

Mature Nature-Based Travelers:

Median Age 60

Interested in visiting Yellowstone National Park and partaking in activities such as scenic driving, day hiking, wildlife watching, and nature photography.

United States: from Washington, California, Idaho, Colorado, Illinois, and Utah

Household Income \$75,000 + per year

May travel in groups and/or in couples.

Young/Midlife Success

Couples& Families, Ages 25-54

Household Income of \$75,000 +

Have a secure homebase

Focused on family/relationship, may have children under 18 in the home

Most completed a college degree

Understand evolving technology and use social media and digital platforms as main trip planning resources and inspiration

Interested in "bucket list" destinations, national parks, and outdoor recreation

Drive Markets

Travelers residing in Canada, Montana, Idaho, Washington, Wyoming, Utah, Colorado, North Dakota, and South Dakota.

3b. What research supports your DMO strategy? :

Attachment: FY25 Visit Gardiner MT_Supporting Research_Internal.pdf; Contains:

- FY24 Social Media Yearly Report Visit Gardiner MT
- FY23 Social Media Yearly Report Visit Gardiner MT

- FY22 Social Media Yearly Report Visit Gardiner MT
- FY21 Social Media Yearly Report Visit Gardiner MT
- FY24 VisitGardinerMT.com Google Analytics
- FY24 VisitGardinerMT.comGoogle Analytics – Screen Grabs
- FY23 VisitGardinerMT.com Google analytics
- FY22 VisitGardinerMT.com Google analytics
- FY21 VisitGardinerMT.com Google analytics
- 2023 Yellowstone Country VIC Grant Completion Summary
- 2022 Yellowstone Country VIC Grant Completion Summary
- 2021 Yellowstone Country VIC Grant Completion Summary
- 2020 Yellowstone Country VIC Grant Completion Summary
- FY24 Google Cross Network Campaign, YTD Results
- FY22 Google Keywords Camping Online Campaign Results
- FY22 Spring Awareness Google Online Campaign Results
- FY21 Spring Online Campaign Results
- VisitGardinerMT.com Google Ad Campaign Results Overview
- FY23 VisitGardinerMT.com Google Analytics Emerging Markets US Cities
- Gardiner Chamber of Commerce Building w Current Branding

Attachments: FY25 Visit Gardiner MT_Supporting Research_External.pdf; Contains

- Yellowstone National Park Visitation December – March 2023 vs. 2024
- Yellowstone National Park Visitation April – November 2022 vs. 2023
- Yellowstone National Park Visitation December – March 2022 vs. 2023
- Yellowstone National Park Visitation April – November 2021 vs. 2022
- Yellowstone National Park Visitation December – March 2021 vs. 2022
- Yellowstone National Park Visitation December – March 2020 vs. 2021
- Yellowstone National Park Visitation April – November 2020 vs. 2021

- Yellowstone National Park Visitation July – November 2019 vs. 2020
- Yellowstone National Park, North Entrance Road February 2024, Project Documents
- National Park Foundation and National Park Service Announce \$40 Million Gift to Meet Urgent Need for Employee Housing at Yellowstone National Park
- The Earned Media Opportunity
- “Montana’s Silent Yellowstone Flood: When Tourist Leave” – The Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis
- “Mass Yellowstone Hunt Kills 1,150 Bison” – The New York Times
- “‘Unprecedented killing’: The Deadliest Season for Yellowstone” – The Washington Post
- “Yellowstone: Wolf hunt altered behavior, damaged research” – Wyoming File

Supporting Research: General

[The Montana Travel Industry – 2023 Summary](#)

[2023 Estimates – Nonresident Visitation, Expenditures, and Economic Contribution](#)

[Gardiner Rodeo 2023, Gardiner MT](#)

[Montana Residents: Attitudes Towards Tourism 2021](#)

[Montana Office of Tourism and Business Development – Tourism Spending](#)

[The Impact of DMO Visitor Guide](#)

[Yellowstone National Park Visitor Study Report](#)

[Gardiner, Montana: Resident Perceptions Before and After Development](#)

Supporting Research: Challenges

[National Park Foundation and National Park Service Announce \\$40 Million Gift to Meet Urgent Need for Employee Housing at Yellowstone National Park](#) (in Attachment: FY25 Visit Gardiner MT_Supporting Research_External)

[Yellowstone National Park, North Entrance Road February 2024, Project Documents](#) (in Attachment: FY25 Visit Gardiner MT_Supporting Research_External)

[“Montana’s Silent Yellowstone Flood: When Tourist Leave” – The Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis](#) (in Attachment: FY25 Visit Gardiner MT_Supporting Research_External)

[“Mass Yellowstone Hunt Kills 1,150 Bison” – The New York Times](#) (in Attachment: FY25 Visit Gardiner MT_Supporting Research_External)

[“Unprecedented killing’: The Deadliest Season for Yellowstone” – The Washington Post](#) (in Attachment: FY25 Visit Gardiner MT_Supporting Research_External)

[“Yellowstone: Wolf hunt altered behavior, damaged research” – Wyoming File](#) (in Attachment: FY25 Visit Gardiner MT_Supporting Research_External)

Supporting Research: Social Media

[How DMO Social Media Drives Travel Decisions](#)

[Social Media and Its Impact on Travelers to Montana](#)

[Global social media statistics research summary 2022](#)

[Global social media stats](#)

Supporting Research: Website Development

[The Impact of DMO Websites](#)

3c. What are your emerging markets?:

Domestic Visitors interested in Yellowstone National Park

Domestic visitors particularly from Denver, Seattle, Englewood area, and Phoenix.

VisitGardinerMT.com Google analytics data from FY24 supports this information; it shows that users from these domestic locations were significant users of the site – Denver 7,632; Seattle 4,700; Englewood 3,834; and Phoenix 3,218.

International Visitors interested in Yellowstone National Park

International visitors particularly from Canada, Germany, the UK, and Australia. As the world fully emerges from the global pandemic and travel restrictions become nearly non-existent the international market is critical to the Gardiner visitor economy as they typically are traveling on a "bucket list trip" and therefore may stay longer, have higher discretionary spending, and usually plan ahead.

VisitGardinerMT.com Google analytics data from FY24 supports this information; it shows most international website users were from the aforementioned countries – Germany with 1,286 users, Canada with 2,120 users, the UK with 856 users, and Australia with 492 users.

Drive Markets

During the 2022 flood event our community was overwhelmed by the support felt from instate and drive market travelers. Being that our community needs more support in the winter we believe that drive markets in the winter time continue to be an emerging market

and we will focus marketing dollars towards this demographic around special events, holidays and long weekends, such as our holiday stroll and President's Day.

4. Describe proposed tactics and projects as related to overall goals and controlled by the organization in its financial statements.:

GOAL #1

When referencing Yellowstone National Park North Entrance visitation numbers from 2023/2024 we wish to increase shoulder season visitation from October through February. With a particular focus on when Yellowstone National Park roads are open to over-snow travel respectively Mid-December through end of February.

GOAL #1– Tactics/Projects

We will achieve this by heavily utilizing partnerships and joint venture opportunities with Yellowstone Country and Brand MT, executing targeted online digital advertising campaigns that drive potential visitors to VisitGardinerMT.com, highlighting events and/or activities unique to the area in the respective winter/spring seasons on VisitGardinerMT social media platforms (for example the Gardiner Holiday Stroll), building relationships with interested parties through targeted email marketing with leads received from National Park Trips Media Planner, print ads in publications that are distributed both nationally and within regional drive markets that include a digital component, and shipping Gardiner Visitor Guides to interested visitors.

GOAL #2

Finish FY25 with a refreshed VisitGardinerMT.com that is more user friendly, reflects other GCVB initiatives like responsible recreation, and contains more visitor resources that are heavily utilized/distributed via paper copies to visitors.

GOAL #2– Tactics/Projects

Tactics include working with our web team, area businesses, locals and travelers, and analyzing/researching area visitor behavior to implement a VisitGardinerMT.com website is competitive in the ever-evolving digital market. Potentially, adding more tools to help track visitor conversions, a direct lodging/excursion booking capability, integrating a google business/maps feature, and more.

GOAL #3

Complete/further the FY24 goal of improving the visitor experience at the Gardiner Visitor Information Center and throughout Gardiner with cohesive and current Visit Gardiner MT branding, additional displays, handouts downloadable via QR code in turn pushing more traffic to VisitGardinerMT.com and reducing paper waste. Continued employment of our semi-year-round employee who has the primary responsibility of improving the visitor experience through related projects and community engagement. Additionally, dispersing/encouraging visitor travel throughout Gardiner by way of wayfinding and an interactive “challenge” that in turn increases community/visitor engagement and promotes responsible recreation practices.

GOAL #3 – Tactics/Projects

Tactics include continued work of contracting/hiring/working with an agency to create and install updated signage at the Gardiner Visitor information Center, updating VisitGardinerMT.com with handouts that are not currently downloadable. Additional tactics include the continued employment of our semi-year round local employee who has the primary responsibility of improving the visitor experience through related projects and community engagement. Redesigning the “Great Gardiner Scavenger Hunt” is tactic that will be utilized to push travelers past the south end of Gardiner, promote responsible recreation, educate visitors on Gardiner history, and provide an outlet for travelers who have time on their hands.

ADDITIONAL OBJECTIVES

Collaborate with other CVBs, tourism organizations, or other appropriate entities, especially within Yellowstone Country, to develop and set common goals, promote events, and foster partnerships. Additionally partner/support tribal communities via events in the surrounding Gardiner area.

Continue the employment of a part-time year-round employee, currently the Visitor Experiences and Community Engagement Coordinator, which is funded through multiple sources including lodging tax collections, non-bed tax collections, and if needed the annual YCMI VIC grant.

5. Define and describe your overall objectives. Objectives are formed from your goals. They are logical, attainable steps to achieve the goals and are able to be measured.:

Objectives/Metrics/Evaluation:

OBJECTIVES	MEASURABLE METRICS FOR SUCCESS	REPORT THE METRIC ACHIEVED	EVALUATION OF SUCCESSFUL METRICS
When referencing Yellowstone National Park North Entrance visitation numbers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Increase October & November North Entrance recreation gate counts by 3%.		

<p>from 2023 we wish to increase shoulder season visitation from October through February. With a particular focus on when Yellowstone National Park roads are open to over-snow travel respectively Mid-December though end of February.</p>	<p>Respectively October from 71,455 (2023) to 73,599 and November from 20,109 (2023) to 20,712.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase December, January, & February North Entrance recreation gate counts by 5%. Respectively December from 25,344 (2023) to 26,611; January from 28,933 (2024) to 30,379; February 32,336 (2024) to 33,952 		
<p>Execute critical backend updates to VisitGardinerMT.com while implementing a website refresh, partial redesign, and is more user friendly across mobile & desktop platforms.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete the necessary updates in a manner that maintains continuous use of VisitGardinerMT.com for users and it does not go down by the end of FY25. • Aligning with another goal, created a dedicated area resource landing page(s) on VisitGardinerMT.com that houses corresponding QR codes (that are trackable to informational downloads) by the 		

	end of FY25.		
<p>Complete/Further the FY24 goal to Enhance the visitor experience with cohesive signage and displays that reflects the updated Gardiner brand and encourages environmentally friendly practices.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completed installation of signage Installation of signage at the Gardiner Visitor Information Center reflective of our current Gardiner branding by the end of FY25. • Redesign the “Great Gardiner Scavenger Hunt” in effort to disperse/encourage visitor travel throughout Gardiner with the goal of distributing at least 50 prizes (to be determined/purchased at a later date) throughout FY25 upon visitor completion of the scavenger hunt. • Ensure that all locations displaying QR Codes once provided by the GCVB are the updated version that is trackable. by the end of FY25. 		
<p>Collaborate with other CVBs, tourism organizations, or other appropriate entities, especially within Yellowstone Country, to develop and set common goals and foster partnerships.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attend 8 meetings/conferences resulting in 3 completed projects such as resiliency planning, a joint marketing project like Path to Paradise, or a joint event promotion like the illuminated teepees. • Attend the annual Montana Governors Conference on Tourism and Recreation. • Attend required TAC meetings. 		

Continue the employment of a part-time year-round employee, currently the Visitor Experiences and Community Engagement Coordinator (VECEC), which is funded through multiple sources including lodging tax collections, non-bed tax collections, and if needed the annual YCMI VIC grant.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain employment of the current VECEC in part by utilizing bed tax collections with in the Visitor Services method. 		
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Budget Form: FY25 DMO Budget Form_GCVB_Complete.xlsx

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DMO Budget:

GARDINER DMO

Allowable Method	Amount Budgeted	% Budgeted	Amend +/-	Updated Budget	% Budgeted
Administration	\$16,437.80	19.25%	\$0.00	\$16,437.80	19.25%
Agency Services	\$500.00	0.59%	\$0.00	\$500.00	0.59%
Cooperative Marketing	\$1,250.00	1.46%	\$0.00	\$1,250.00	1.46%
Earned Media/Tourism Sales	\$500.00	0.59%	\$0.00	\$500.00	0.59%
Education/Outreach	\$1,800.00	2.11%	\$0.00	\$1,800.00	2.11%
Joint Ventures	\$6,500.00	7.61%	\$0.00	\$6,500.00	7.61%
Marketing Resources	\$1,500.00	1.76%	\$0.00	\$1,500.00	1.76%
Opportunity Marketing	\$50.00	0.06%	\$0.00	\$50.00	0.06%
Paid Media	\$22,315.00	26.13%	\$0.00	\$22,315.00	26.13%
Product Development	\$5,925.00	6.94%	\$0.00	\$5,925.00	6.94%
Visitor Services	\$15,111.00	17.70%	\$0.00	\$15,111.00	17.70%
Website Development (Online, Website, Mobile)	\$13,500.00	15.81%	\$0.00	\$13,500.00	15.81%
	\$0.00	0.00%	\$0.00	\$0.00	0.00%
	\$0.00	0.00%	\$0.00	\$0.00	0.00%
	\$0.00	0.00%	\$0.00	\$0.00	0.00%
TOTAL BUDGET	\$85,388.80	100.00%	\$0.00	\$85,388.80	100.00%

Revenue Projection	\$82,189.00
Funds not spent during previous fiscal year	\$3,200.00
Rollover Funds at Commerce	\$0.00
Allocated Following Audit	\$0.00

Budget increase total

\$85,389.00

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Narrative Evaluation: